

35MILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND
EEFOEMER 49

ing classes, — publicly complimented him. Truth to tell, he now read a great deal, even in class time, still devouring the poets, but finding a delight also in Eabelais, Montaigne, and other prose authors. And he carried on an interminable correspondence with his friends in Provence, at times addressing them in verse, at others launching into discussions on philosophy, morals, and aesthetics. It was now, too, that lie wrote Ms tale, "La E³e Amoureuse," which was therefore the earliest of his "Contes k Ninon," in which volume it afterwards appeared. Thus, in spite of his declared preference for a scientific career, his literary bent was steadily asserting itself.

At the end of Ms school year his only award was a second prize for French composition. Nevertheless, his mother, having scraped a little money together, allowed Mm to go to Provence for the vacation, which he spent with Bailie and C&anne. But on coming back to Paris in October he fell ill with a mucous fever of such severity that more than once a fatal issue was feared. "When, after a period of convalescence, he returned to St. Louis, there entering the rhetoric class, two months had been lost and he still felt weak. Thus, though his new master, M. Lalanne, commended some of his work, notably his compositions, his

progress was
not great, particularly as his mind turned so frequently to
Provence and his friends there, and hesitated "between the scientific avocations of his choice and an increasing ambition to become a poet. "When, however, the school year ended in August, 1859, his mother's position being as precarious as ever, he resolved to make an effort. He would skip the philosophy class and at once offer himself as a candidate for the degree of bachelor in sciences — that, or a corre-
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